

GNP 3.0

One man's humble attempt to become a happier, more balanced person.

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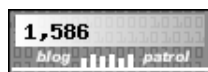
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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 02, 2007

33

I turned 33 just over two months ago. As many of may recall, I set a goal to reach a weight of 195 pounds by that birthday and barely made it (see [post](#)). I also signed up for Weight Watchers Online (see [post](#)) but I haven't really gotten into it. So I was trying to think of some new weight loss goal and decided to go with the "skinny jeans" approach rather than the "pick a target weight" approach. Toward that end, I bought a pair of [size 33 jeans](#) the other day. The jeans are a bit on the pricey side (ok, more than a bit) but I picked this brand since they also have a [line of jeans](#) based on my favorite HBO show




[Entourage](#). The pair of jeans I bought isn't from that line (since I didn't like any of the colors / styles) but that's how I ended up with this company. I suppose the other side-benefit of the jeans being expensive is that it will provide additional motivation to fit into them so I can get some use out of the investment. As many of you might know, it's hard for me to spend money on clothes. Just doesn't seem like the best use of money relative to other investment options.

In terms of how much of a "sketch goal" this is, I have a pair of 36-waist jeans and they're very baggy. I also have a pair of 35-waist jeans that fit but also have a bit of room in them. My best guess is that I'm a size 34 1/2 right now. So getting into a size 33 pair of jeans would represent going down roughly 1.5 to 2 pant sizes. The size 33 also have the nice coincidence of being the same number as my age - I love little symbolic connections like that. =)

Speaking of symbolic connections, I figure I'll set one more goal while I'm at it. Before I turn 34 next year, I'd like to figure out what I'm doing with organized religion. After this past birthday, my brother-in-law said to me: "did you know that Jesus was crucified when he was 33?" At the time, I said to myself that was a sign I should go the next step and try to figure things out further. But then I put the thought out of my mind. But it has lingered long enough that I think I need to do something about it. Not exactly sure what the "exit criteria" are for this goal but I'll figure it out as I go. If I were going to "affiliate" with a particular organized religion at this point, it would probably be the [LDS Church](#) but that's certainly not a given at this stage of the game. I suppose if all goes well I'll be wearing my skinny jeans to a church function sometime in the next 10 months. =)



Posted by gnp at [12:33 PM](#) 
Labels: [fat2phat](#) , [religion](#)

1 comments:

Andrew "Art" Clarke said...

I believe when Jesus turned 33 he also fit into a size 33 pair of pants :)

But seriously, I'm curious about what you hope to get out of organized religion? (I'm not implying there is nothing to be gotten -- I genuinely want to know what you think can be gotten from it).

3:28 PM

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SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2007

[Investigating the LDS Church](#)

Interesting example (from my perspective) of things happening for a reason. Two weeks ago, I decided to set a weight loss goal of fitting into a pair of size 33 jeans. In the course of writing that post, it made me think of a statement my brother-in-law had made and I decided to also set a goal of deciding what I want to do with organized religion. But the religion goal was almost entirely "oh by the way" compared to the weight loss goal. Then, a couple of hours later, a friend of mine innocently posts a comment on my blog asking me "what [I] hope to get out of organized religion?" A fair enough question. That got me thinking about why I'd potentially want to take things to the next level with organized religion. In the course of thinking about this question, two things came to mind: (1) community and (2) eternal families. Regarding community, I've read in a couple of different places (like this [article](#) on ExploreFaith.org) that a relationship with God can most richly be experienced in a community of like-minded believers. Conversely, everyone being too like-minded can also be a problem (see this [past post](#)) but I think there's something to be said for community. Regarding eternal families, I've always felt that my relationship with my wife and kids would transcend this world - or at least I'd like to believe it will.

Now, I was planning to send my friend an email with this explanation (and possible post it on my blog) but decided to go looking for an explanation of eternal families that I could share with him. I figured it would be easy to find and I'd be done in 5-10 minutes. Since I knew the LDS Church believed in this concept, I decided to look there. At the time, I wasn't aware that the LDS Church has a monopoly (so to speak) on this belief. At any rate, I figured there would be a page on the LDS web site that succinctly summarized this belief. After viewing a bunch of videos and reading a bunch of pages, I surprisingly couldn't find what I was looking for. The concept was mentioned in multiple spots but there was nothing that would summarize the concept for someone not familiar with the rest of the LDS beliefs.

Now, here's the interesting thing. In the cause of looking for this phantom page, I did come across a [page](#) that included a quote from the Book of Mormon: "And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere

heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost?" ([Moroni 10:4](#)).

In one of my earliest posts ([link](#)), I mentioned the following experience:

My belief in God actually happened quite suddenly when I was 19. My wife (then girlfriend) and her family are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – the Mormon Church as it's more commonly referred to. As my wife's sister was preparing for her mission to Chile, I began talking to her about religion in general and the Mormon faith in particular. Specifically, I asked her how someone goes from not believing in God to believing. Her simple answer to that question is that you pray about it – you read a particular faith's doctrinal materials (e.g., the Bible) and ask God whether that faith is "true". So, that's what I did. One night I read portions of the Book of Mormon and knelt down by my bed to pray about it. At first, my mind was very chaotic and I couldn't focus on what I wanted to say to God. But, moments later, my mind become very clear and I felt peaceful. The feeling didn't last long and I wasn't "saying" anything at the time, but that brief moment solidified my belief in God. My interest in God had been growing over time and there were certainly seeds planted prior to this, but that one moment, that feeling of peace was the tipping point.

Ironically, the moment that solidified my belief in God in general did not solidify my belief in the Mormon Church in particular – although the genesis of that pivotal prayer was reading the Book of Mormon. At the time, I was simply seeking the existence of God – something larger than myself. I wasn't ready for more than that and God didn't proactively offer it up.

In reality, the question that I asked God that night wasn't "do you exist?" but "is this true?" (after reading the passage of the Book of Mormon above). For a whole variety of reasons (that I won't get into), I've applied revisionist history to that event since an answer to the latter question has farther reaching implications than the former.

So, here I am. In the course of about eight hours, I decide to buy some skinny jeans, set a "by the way" religion goal, a friend of mine asks me an innocent question, I go looking for a simple explanation, don't find it, get reminded of an experience 14 years ago, and view the significance of that experience through a new set of eyes. It's hard for me to believe that's a random set of events.

Now, you might ask the question "if you're sure you had this experience 14 years ago, why aren't you rushing out and getting baptized as quickly as possible?" and that's also a fair question. One answer is "it's already been 14 years, what's another couple of months?" Another answer

is "this happened 14 years ago so let's not be too hasty about what it means". That being said, I am taking it seriously and trying to decide for myself what it means for me.

In terms of investigating the LDS Church, one person I spoke with suggested that I begin with the following sections of the Book of Mormon:

Introduction

2 Nephi -- Chapters [2](#), [31](#), [32](#), [33](#)

Mosiah -- Chapters [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [15](#), [16](#), [18](#)

Alma -- Chapters [5](#), [7](#), [32](#), [34](#), [36](#), [37](#), [41](#)


3 Nephi -- Chapters [1](#), [11](#), [18](#), [19](#), [27](#)

Ether Chapter [12](#)

Moroni Chapter [10](#)

If there are others people would suggest, please post a comment or send me an email directly. Also, I mentioned to this same person that I've never personally connected with any of the Mormon missionaries I've met in the past. When I asked if there is a "self-study" version of the missionary lesson, the person suggested *Preach My Gospel* (one of the manuals that missionaries use). My sister-in-law HG let me borrow her copy and I've read the whole thing (except the chapters on time management and finding people).

So, there you have it. We'll see where this investigation leads but that's the "back story" for those who are interested.

Posted by gnp at [8:25 PM](#) 

Labels: [religion](#) , [spirituality](#)

3 comments:

gnp said...

Comment from NG (except using initials rather than full names):

Great article.

I remember before you and AG were married you visited grandma GL and we stopped by to meet you. We all took an immediately liking to you and grandma always commented on how well you treated AG.

[11:02 PM](#)

gnp said...

Regarding eternal marriages, JW pointed me to "The Family: A Proclamation to the World" as a succinct statement of the belief in the eternal nature of families. See

<http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,161-1-11-1,00.html> to read it.

[10:22 PM](#)

David "El Salsero" said...

I agree, the eternal family concept is unique and powerful. It has its problems, but in general I think you are right in that its the first Christian view of what happens to us after death. I can get behind something that seems logical, and why not. We are united here on earth in marriage, so why can't that continue in heaven.

12:26 AM

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Behind?

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June 25, 2006

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 06, 2007

January 19, 2008

I'll warn you in advance that some of you will read this entry and think I've lost my mind. Others will read it and think it's cool. You're all right. I'll also warn you in advance that this entry will be pretty long. For those of you with short attention spans, here are the key takeaways. I've set Saturday, January 19, 2008 as my date to be baptized into the [Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints](#). Between now and then, I'm going to visit the [Fresno](#), [Sacramento](#), [Oakland](#), and [DC](#) temples to help build my testimony.

Now, for those of you with a little time on your hands, let me give you all the gory details. As I discussed in a [previous post](#), I've been officially investigating the LDS Church for the last month and a half based on a seemingly random chain of events that reminded me of an experience I had 14 years ago. During the last six weeks, I've had various meetings with the missionaries along with other ward members. I've been reading the Book of Mormon (BOM) for the last 10 days based on not wanting to be outdone by an 11-year old (see [post](#)). And I've been praying consistently while reading the BOM - mostly to get something out of the reading but also to find answers to my questions.

Going into this process, I wouldn't have guessed I'd end up at this point so quickly. There was even a point with the missionaries where I was planning to "take a break" from further discussions but changed my mind during the meeting in which I was going to deliver that message. I've had swings (sometimes within the same day) from thinking I was ready to be baptized right then to thinking it would never happen. So it hasn't been a perfectly smooth process but that's probably by design.

In terms of the tipping point, it was a rapid set of events over a 48 hour period. Last Friday, I had a meeting with the missionaries. I had taken the day off from work to catch up on personal matters - mostly this blog. As you may have noticed, I had a flurry of seven blog entries that day, including four about *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. As it turns out, the President of the San Francisco Mission joined the missionaries for this meeting. We ended up talking for 2 hours (a typical meeting is supposed to be 45 minutes) and I only ended the conversation because I was very late for some dinner guests at home. We covered a wide range of topics during that meeting, including PK giving me an overview of

structure and chronology of the BOM. Given his obvious deep knowledge of the material, I posed all my "hard" questions to him and he had immediate responses. I got the distinct impression that there was no (doctrinal) question I could ask him that he wouldn't have a good answer for. In addition to his depth of knowledge, I was also impressed with PK's obvious depth of character. He seemed to have a genuine desire to find the truth wherever it may be - having read, for example, the Qur'an and scriptures of other faiths. He also had a genuine interest in serving others and spreading the Gospel.

During this meeting, the missionaries asked "you seem ready, what's holding you back from being baptized?" Based on the flow of the conversation, it was a fair and logical question. My response was that I'd like to believe that I'm the type of person who does what he says he's going to do. So if I make certain covenants with God, I'm going to keep them. But I wouldn't make that decision lightly. Also, I hadn't finished reading the BOM yet so I didn't see the harm in getting to the end of the process - even if it meant waiting to make the decision for another 30, 60, or 90 days (or more). Who knows, maybe I'd find something in the BOM that I wouldn't be able to get comfortable with - although I didn't think that was likely. The missionaries and the Mission President were very understanding and didn't apply any pressure. They just asked the question and left it at that.

On the way home and later that evening, I thought about the baptism discussion I'd had and what was holding me back. I read over the baptismal interview questions on page 206 of *Preach My Gospel* - also see [here](#). After reading through these questions a couple of times and thinking about it, I sent the following email to JW:

Subject: Believe vs willing to believe

Hi JW,

I had another good meeting with the missionaries today. And PK was able to join us too. I'm reading through the baptismal interview questions on page 206 of Preach My Gospel - specifically the first two:

(1a) Do you believe that God is our Eternal Father?

(1b) Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world?

(2a) Do you believe the Church and gospel of Jesus Christ have been restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith?

(2b) Do you believe that [current Church President] is a prophet of God?

For 1a, my answer would be yes. For 1b, 2a, and 2b, my answer would be that I'm willing to believe those things since I don't have a

compelling reason not to believe them. Is that sufficient at this stage of the game? Or is "believe" the moral equivalent of "know with certainty" in this context (e.g., do you know with certainty that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior and Redeemer of the world?). Trying to understand the bar from the Church's perspective and independently reconcile that with my own bar for entering into covenants with God.

One of the questions the missionaries asked me was what's holding me back from being baptized. This difference between belief (and knowing with certainty) vs being willing to believe (but not knowing with certainty) is one of the main things holding me back so thought I'd solicit your opinion on the matter. To the extent it makes a difference, when I say "know with certainty", I implicitly mean "know in my heart" as opposed to purely "knowing in an intellectual way".

*Thanks,
GNP*

It was late at that point so I ended up leaving my stuff out and going to bed. The next morning, I went to put *Preach My Gospel* (still open to the baptismal interview questions) away in my backpack. As I did, page 4 of the [October 2007 issue](#) of *Ensign* stared back at me. Many weeks ago I had opened the magazine to the first article but hadn't had time to read it. So the magazine had been sitting in my backpack ever since, still open to that article. On the opposing page (and the side facing me as I opened my bag) was a picture of Christ being baptized by John the Baptist. Now, the magazine wasn't the only thing in my backpack. It was part of a big stack of papers and books but it just so happens that I went to insert *Preach My Gospel* into my bag at the place in the stack where this picture was staring back at me right in the face. You could certainly chock that up to random coincidence but I don't believe in random coincidences (see [post](#)). I took this as an unmistakable sign that, despite my reservations (that I had expressed the night before), I was supposed to be baptized. So I got the ball rolling in my mind regarding what date I should pick, etc.

But this still left me with an obvious problem. Even though I received this sign I was supposed to be baptized, it didn't magically change the fact that the strength of my testimony hadn't changed in 8 hours while I had been sleeping. The day unfolded without much more drama - just a variety of activities with the kids. That night, my wife and I went to an 80's party at a friend's house. As we were leaving the party, I saw on my Treo that I had received a reply from JW to my email. I was hoping he'd let me off the hook and say that being willing to believe was enough, but alas he's not that type of guy. He's one of those people who tells you what you don't want to hear but know is true. The gist of his response was that the interview questions are asking about your personal testimony and that I should continue to read the BOM and pray about it

to build mine. For encouragement, he cited D&C 112:10: "Be thou humble; and the Lord thy God shall lead thee by the hand, and give thee answer to thy prayers."

We get home from the party and I decide to make some further progress on the BOM. I was in the middle of some challenging chapters in 2 Nephi by Isaiah and honestly not getting a lot out of it. Even though I had prayed before opening the BOM for assistance focusing on the material and assessing its truth, I couldn't help thinking about JW's response about building my testimony. For awhile, people had been suggesting varying forms of fasting and prayer to know what I should do (or know whether the BOM was true). I had this picture in my head of going off by myself at some point for some solitude and prayer to get me over the hump. Similar to Joseph Smith in the woods or Jesus in Gethsemane, I was going to go off into nature to pray and find answers to my questions. But, in my mind, I was going to go on the hike or was going to sit around some place scenic. In the midst of reading the BOM, I got an overwhelming feeling (message) that I was supposed to go to temples rather than nature to build my testimony. I stopped what I was doing and dwelled in the moment. What I specifically took away was that I was supposed to visit the Fresno temple with my wife's uncle this Saturday (during a previously scheduled visit), visit the DC temple while visiting my parents for Christmas and New Years, and visit the Sacramento and Oakland temples somewhere in between.

Now, let's be clear about a couple of things. At the time (and even now), it's not at all clear to me what I'm supposed to do or what I'm supposed to learn by going to these temples. Also, I feel totally ridiculous every time I tell anyone this part of the story because (a) it's not clear why God would instruct me to do this and (b) he instructed me to visit multiple buildings that I can't even enter. For those of you who are fans of the movie Pee Wee's Big Adventure, it feels like being told to pack my bags for San Antonio so I can find my bike in the basement of the Alamo when the Alamo doesn't have a basement to begin with. That said, I'm not questioning this instruction in any way and made plans to following morning to visit these four temples. When God tells you to do something (or at least you believe that to be true), you do it, no questions asked.

[Aside #1: I was also tempted to book a flight to visit the Salt Lake temple to see the statue of Christ in the visitor center there. It's one of my few childhood memories from an around-the-country trip we took one summer. But I don't believe it was part of the official guidance so I'll do it another time.]

[Aside #2: The purpose of visiting the Fresno temple may already have become clear. My wife's aunt and uncle are friends with the Fresno Mission President and he will be joining us for my visit to that temple. So I assume that could be the reason I was meant to go to that temple -

but I could be wrong.]

[Aside #3: One hypothesis I had is that perhaps God is instructing me to go to these temples precisely because I can't go into them. Effectively, I'd go to these places and all I'd take away from them is a disappointment of not being able to go inside. And then have that motivate me to make changes in my life - including being baptized - so that I could enter the temple down the road.]

[Aside #4: My sister-in-law HG was joking the other night that I must be going for a world record in terms of how many missionaries (and Mission Presidents) I can have involved in my conversion. So far I've met with three missionaries in the ward and my wife's sister NR got me on this path in the first place 14 years ago during her mission in Chile. Then there's the San Francisco Mission President and soon to be the Fresno Mission President. And presumably I'll end up talking with one or more missionaries at each of the Sacramento, Oakland, and DC temples. Crazy.]


Ok, back to Saturday. I get this personal revelation and decide to go to bed. That night, I have a dream about a house burning down and being reduced to rubble. You could argue this doesn't mean anything (and you might be right) but I interpreted it as follows. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis makes the analogy of imagining yourself as a house that God will rebuild into a palace that He will live in personally (see [post](#)). People also refer to confirmation (following baptism with water) as "baptism with fire". So I interpreted this dream (the picture of which is still in my head even now) to mean that God is going to burn down my house (figuratively) and build me back up exactly how he wants me (and for his purpose). A couple of reactions that morning: (1) "enough already, I get it, I'm supposed to get baptized", (2) I'll personally end up in a better place in my life long-term but the burn-down and rebuild process is going to be *really* unpleasant and I hope God gives me the strength to get through it, and (3) God isn't messing around, he's got plans for me independent of what I might otherwise want or what would be personally easy for me; but I better accept God's plan and callings when the time comes regardless of what else I have going on.

So that's the scoop. Now, you may have one more question in your mind so let me answer it. Why January 19, 2008? Is there something special about that date? The short answer is no. I needed a date in the new year so I'd have time to visit the DC temple over the holidays. I also needed to build in time for the baptismal interview to occur once I got back. And I wanted my sister-in-law NR to be at the baptism (since she got me on the path 14 years ago) and that Saturday worked for her family. So I booked a flight out for her and locked in the date with the missionaries. But otherwise, there's nothing special about the date other than it being the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed (of Islam) in 570 AD (according

to Today in History) - but that had *absolutely nothing* to do with it (although it is an intriguing "coincidence").

As I mentioned in the opening, some of you (if you got this far in the post) will think I've lost my mind and others will think this is all very cool. It's up to you to make that judgement for yourself. All I can say is that this sequence of events holds personal significance to me - so much so that I've decided to be baptized into a particular Church (on the assumption / faith that my testimony will grow sufficiently in the meantime) and also blindly do a "temple tour" without knowing in advance what I'm supposed to do at each location when I get there. What I do know, however, is that if I ever get asked to do a talk on "the Lord works in mysterious ways", I'll definitely have plenty of material. =)

PS - You're all invited to the baptism and/or confirmation if you want to attend. But certainly do not feel compelled to be there. I know you'll all be there in spirit.

Posted by gnp at 7:21 PM 
Labels: [key post](#) , [religion](#) , [spirituality](#)

5 comments:

ap said...

Regardless of where you end up on your path in the next few months, I have been impressed by your desire to find answers to some big questions and your honesty with yourself in the process. Over the last 15 years, I have learned much from you about conviction, friendship, and holding to one's own moral center. I hope you continue to uncover what you are seeking. love you.

1:16 PM

David "El Salsero" said...

Congratulations! This is a the first big step, and I'm sure there will be many to come. Perhaps you will serve as an example for others who are still aimlessly in search of a greater meaning or purpose to life.

I'm looking forward to sharing in the many adventures this new journey will bring you. No doubt, the road will be hard, but I think in the end it will be well worth all the sacrifice. And don't forget, what we do in life now does echo an eternity.

The following scriptures always hit home for me. I think it is fair to say that they apply to you now:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

--Corinthians 5:17

The New Man

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.”

--Ephesians 4:17-24

9:57 PM

hcg said...

Wow. What an amazing story. I am so happy for you and so proud of you for following your heart. I know the whole "burn the house down" thing seems scary, but I really believe that the happy moments of your journey will FAR outnumber and outweigh the painful moments. Wherever this path leads, I'll love you!

10:43 PM

7.5 years ago said...

Came across your blog after the missionaries borrowed my computer during their P-day activities. Much more interesting than reading my own emails and very thought provoking about my own conversion. It is an incredible journey and the right one to take, despite the fact realizing it is the right one to take may take some time and include some rough spots along the way.

One thing I have learned is that the Lord will NEVER tell you to do something that is wrong. He doesn't work that way. You will have greater promptings from the Spirit after following in faith those you have already received. You have already figured that out with your visit to the Fresno temple and I would be excited if I were you and anticipate with joy the lessons you will learn while visiting the other temples you have on your list. You will see a statue of Christ, the same one I believe that is in Salt Lake, when you visit the Oakland Temple and visitors center.

I look forward to your baptism. There is no better way to start the year!

10:09 PM

Paul said...

This is very inspiring. I'm constantly in the process of renewing my faith, so we're on the same journey. Welcome.

10:40 PM

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GNP 3.0

One man's humble attempt to become a happier, more balanced person.

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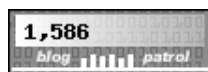
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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2007

I'm all in

Part one of the "temple tour" is complete. For those of you who like to cut to the chase, here are the key takeaways. I now know that I know. I will bear my testimony of that at the December 2 fast & testimony meeting (even though I won't be a member at that point). Future temple visits and discussions will focus on (a) how to maintain and deepen my testimony & commitment once I come out of the "honeymoon period" with the Church and (b) how to be ready for what will be asked of me. As an aside, if there was any doubt before, I have officially lost my mind - but it's a very good thing.

I'm guessing at least one of you is interested in the details so here you go. Today, I visited the Fresno temple with my wife's uncle (GH) - see [previous post](#) for rationale. I fasted for the visit - which was both easier and harder than I had predicted - although the level of difficulty is mostly irrelevant since fasting was asked of me so I didn't have any choice in the matter. During the visit, I met the President of the California Fresno Mission along with the First Counselor of the Fresno Temple (FCF, who also happened to have served as a Mission President in Australia and whose birthday is the day after I'm planning to be baptized). The Fresno Mission President (PB) was formerly the Stake President in Utah for my sister-in-law NR (the one who led to my first spiritual experience with the Church 14 years ago) and her husband. He also happened to know the California San Francisco Mission President (who I met with 8 days ago) and called him prior to my visit. GH's great-grandfather joined the Church in October 1830 - 6 months after it was established - and probably knew Joseph Smith personally. And, during the visit, I also happened to meet a couple who are friends of my mother-in-law and father-in-law from a number of years ago. All purely coincidence? I personally don't think so but others can make their own judgments.

In terms of the visit itself, GH and I met PB outside of the Temple at 11am. I asked GH to start us off with a prayer - which he graciously accommodated. We chatted for a little bit before entering the lobby of the Temple. PB introduced me to FCF and the three of us talked for about a half hour. During that conversation, PB and FCF talked about different aspects of temples along with various Church beliefs. After awhile, they asked me if there were any specific questions they could

answer and I said "no". In fact, I said that, as they were talking, I felt that they were "preaching to the converted" and that perhaps that feeling was the point of my visit to this particular Temple. Making that statement was basically when I knew that I knew. [As an aside, if you haven't heard or read the "Knowing That We Know" talk from the last General Conference, definitely check it out if you're interested in building a personal testimony.]

After this discussion with FCF, PB and I took a short walk around the grounds. We talked about the "Knowing That We Know" talk. I also told him that I have a feeling that God will ask a great deal from me - especially given the stature of people he is sending to me now - and that thought was both humbling and scary. Specifically, I'm concerned that I won't have the right level of enthusiasm (or attitude) at the time (due to other considerations in my life like work or family) and/or that I won't have the ability to live up to the calling. PB had some very helpful and comforting insights in this regard. He shared that he has had callings of his own that he feared he wasn't qualified for or that there had been a mistake in the revelation that had been received - but in all of those instances, God had given him the strength and ability that he needed to fulfill his responsibilities.

I hate to make a gambling analogy in the context of religion but it's been in my head all day. Both during and after the visit, the phrase "I'm all in" kept going through my mind. I was taking all my chips and making this bet, this leap of faith, on the Church. There are still a number of things I don't know about the Church, the Book of Mormon, etc but I'm betting all my chips. I'm "all in" at this point.

That's everything for the Temple visit itself. During the 3-hour drive home, I had time to reflect on what had happened today. During that drive, I came to some additional conclusions (that I believe are at the prompting of the Spirit). First, I have three more temple visits before I get baptized (Sacramento, Oakland, and DC). Given the fact that I now have a testimony, what am I supposed to get out of those other visits? I don't know for sure but I believe one aspect of that is trying to answer two questions: (a) how to maintain and deepen my testimony & commitment once I come out of the "honeymoon period" with the Church and (b) how to be ready for what will be asked of me. In terms of the first question, I was talking to my brother-in-law JG last night and he compared a testimony to a marriage. In his case, he was comparing the question "when did you know that you know?" to "when did you know that you love your wife?" But that got me thinking more broadly about testimony and commitment building in the context of marriage. In particular, I was thinking about how many people have the misconception that if you find the right person to marry, everything else should come totally naturally and that you'll live "happily ever after". In reality, having a strong marriage takes a lot of work, particularly after

you get past the excitement of the "honeymoon period" and settle into regular, day-to-day life. At that point, it becomes easy to take the marriage for granted and invest your energies in other areas of your life when in reality the marriage needs more (not less) attention at each subsequent stage.

And, second, I decided to bear my testimony at the next fast & testimony meeting on Sunday, December 2. That is coincidentally the day after I'm planning to visit the Sacramento and Oakland temples. While potentially odd (since I won't be a member at that point), the rationale is multi-fold: (a) serve as a forcing function and test of my testimony, (b) help reinforce or build the testimony of others, and (c) help ward off evil. This last element may not be immediately obvious. Multiple people have told me that Satan works hardest on people during the period in between when they decide to be baptized and when the baptism actually occurs. Given the long delay between now and January 19, I may be especially exposed in that regard. Which also means that I can most use the help and support of others - hence the public proclamation on December 2 (and a similar proclamation and request for help here in this blog).

One final thought. I would have *never* requested that GH have a stroke and almost die (multiple times). But I am personally grateful that happened in his life. Had it not, I would have never taken a personal interest in GH and his wife PH - and today's experience wouldn't have been possible. At some point in the future, it's possible that I still would have gained a testimony of the Church. It's possible that I would come to know that I know. But I personally believe that it was supposed to happen today in this way - that in the grand scheme of things all of these things (including GH's health struggles) have happened for a reason. And at least today, that reason was to help me build my testimony. So I am grateful for that and continue to be in awe of the interconnectedness of our lives.

I say these things in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Posted by gnp at [11:27 PM](#) 
Labels: [key post](#) , [marriage](#) , [religion](#) , [spirituality](#)

2 comments:

Never lived in Utah said...

If you ever want to visit the Boston temple just drop a line.

Methinks you'll be telling this story to a rather large audience someday...

MM

5:27 PM

gnp said...

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 15:13

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

10:29 PM

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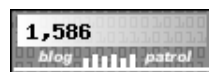
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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 09, 2007

First Vision

Last Saturday (December 1), I visited the Oakland and Sacramento LDS temples (see [prior post](#) for rationale). The most significant outcome of those visits was gaining a personal testimony of Joseph Smith's First Vision and that Joseph Smith was a prophet. When I bore my testimony last Sunday in front of the congregation (see [prior post](#) for rationale), I mentioned that I had previously intellectually known (or at least didn't actively disbelieve) these things but now knew in my heart that they were true.

Many of you probably don't know what the "First Vision" is so let me attempt to give some brief background - more [here](#). When Joseph Smith was 14 years old, he was trying to decide which Christian denomination to join. While reading the Bible, he came across [James 1:5](#): "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him". Joseph decided to put this promise to the test. In the Joseph Smith History 1:12-13, it says:

12 Never did any passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again, knowing that if any person needed wisdom from God, I did; for how to act I did not know, and unless I could get more wisdom than I then had, I would never know; for the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible.

13 At length I came to the conclusion that I must either remain in darkness and confusion, or else I must do as James direct, that is, ask of God. I at length came to the determination to "ask of God," concluding that if he gave wisdom to them that lacked wisdom, and would give liberally, and not upbraid, I might venture.

On a spring day in 1820, he prayed in a grove of trees to know which church was true. God the Father and Jesus Christ, "two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description," appeared and spoke with him. In the Joseph Smith History 1:17-19, it goes on to say:

17 One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing

to the other - This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!

18 My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join. No sooner, therefore, did I get possession of myself, so as to be able to speak, than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong) - and which I should join.

19 I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."

So, basically, Joseph Smith is visited by God and Jesus Christ and told that he shouldn't join any of the churches of that day and that he should await further instructions from on high. This is a fantastic story and one that *many* people have a *very* hard time accepting. As I mentioned earlier, I didn't disbelieve that Joseph Smith had this First Vision or that he was a prophet of God, but I also didn't have a burning conviction that they were true either.

On Friday night, my brother-in-law DE came over and we watched a movie. After he left, I decided to pray that I would get something out of the temple visits the next day. As I did so, I had a visceral experience that I couldn't explain at the time. I had the feeling of pressure pushing down upon me but also an aura or force field around me as well. I also remember pleading with God to stay with me during this experience. After I was done praying, I remember thinking "that was an odd experience" but I didn't read into it any more than that.

The following day, I visited the Oakland temple in the morning. At the visitor center, they were showing the movie "Joseph Smith: Prophet of the Restoration". One of the missionaries had told me that I should definitely check it out if I had a chance. During the movie, they visually depicted the First Vision, including this part described in the Joseph Smith History 1:15-16:

15 After I had retired to the place where I had previously designed to go, having looked around me, and finding myself alone, I kneeled down and began to offer up the desires of my heart to God. I had scarcely done so, when immediately I was seized by some power which entirely overcame me, and had such an astonishing influence over me as to bind my tongue so that I could not speak. Thick darkness gathered around me, and it seemed to me for a time as if I were doomed to sudden destruction.

16 But, exerting all my powers to call upon God to deliver me out of the power of this enemy which had seized upon me, and at the very

moment when I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction - not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being - just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.

I didn't know about this dark initial part of the First Vision at the time so it took me by surprise when I saw it on screen. But I immediately connected with it, though, given my "odd experience" the night before. It was then and there that I knew in my heart that the First Vision took place as Joseph Smith had described and that he was a prophet of God. Honestly, this was the last thing I was expecting to get out of the day but I can't deny it either.

Shortly after the movie ended, I decided to offer a short prayer outside the temple with my sister-in-law HG. It was a chilly, windy, cloudy day. When we sat down and I began my prayer, the sun came out from behind the clouds and shone down on me and HG. I remember the warmth it brought and the intensity of the light through my eyelids. I actually paused at one point to soak it all in and then abruptly ended the prayer because any further thoughts exited my mind. I wouldn't go so far as to say that the Lord was showing favor for me in this moment. If anything, it reminded me of an experience about a week prior. My brother-in-law TR got laid off unexpectedly from his job just before Thanksgiving. I decided to fast that he might find a new job and that this experience might help him in his life someday. I decided to fast from 1pm on Wednesday, November 21 (the day before Thanksgiving) to 3pm on Thursday, November 22 (Thanksgiving day). I decided to skip dinner and breakfast since I had a business lunch already scheduled that Wednesday and it had been months in the making. I also didn't want to skip the Thanksgiving lunch/dinner that my brother-in-law DE was preparing. That Wednesday afternoon, I decided to start my fast with a prayer. I didn't want to do it at work so I went for a short walk. I got about 5 or 6 blocks from my office and found a quiet spot in an industrial complex. It was a bright California day and I remember the warmth and brightness of the sun as I prayed to begin my fast that it might help TR find a new position. TR hasn't found a new job yet but perhaps the later experience at the Oakland temple was God's way of telling me he had heard my prayer and that my fast would help TR in some small way. [Aside: I fasted on December 1 as part of the temple visits.]

That's everything for the Oakland temple. The Sacramento temple visit was much less eventful. HG and I drove 2 hours from the Oakland temple to the Sacramento temple and arrived around 2:30 or 3pm. It's a small temple and there is no visitor's center or anything like that. I had one suggestion for someone to speak with at the Sacramento temple but


he wasn't available. So HG and I walked around the grounds - which aren't that big and I'd seen them before when I visited the open house for this temple last August (see [prior post](#)). HG had visited the open house as well and shared her observation that she had felt a noticeable difference between the Sacramento temple during the open house compared with other temples she had been in. Basically, her observation was that temples are just beautiful buildings until they are dedicated. I thought that was an interesting insight and one that I'll file away for future reflection.

I'm curious to see what the Washington, DC and Rexburg temples have in store for me. Just as I'm composing this part of the post, an email came in regarding my missionary work talk (see [previous post](#)). It says:

True to your comments on missionaries converting themselves, one of the times that I felt a true acceleration in my conversion was during my first Christmas on my mission. I cannot pinpoint the moment exactly, but I remember feeling completely overcome with a sudden understanding of why we (as a people) were celebrating: We have a Savior! I was filled with such joy and thankfulness at the thought of the Messiah. It seemed to sink deeper into my understanding, and for a time, I was truly overwhelmed with joy and relief. Then, it deepened further, and I was impressed with the sense of responsibility I had to share that understanding. It was a crowning moment for me to suddenly realize that I was a missionary preaching of Christ on Christmas. It felt so right.

It's not lost on me that I'll be visiting the DC temple right around Christmas. So, if I had to guess, I would say that visit may provide a deeper understanding of Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice. But I've been dead-wrong with my other predictions so I suspect I'll get something else out of the visit. I think the feeling of surprise is part of what drives home for me that the messages I'm taking away from these experiences are genuine and not a result of "wish fulfillment" or "delusion". God knows how my mind works and is tailoring his message so I can recognize and accept it.

There are some additional implications of my "First Vision" experience but it's late so I'll save them for another post. As DE says, good night and good luck.

Posted by gnp at 10:17 PM 
Labels: [key post](#) , [religion](#)

4 comments:

Never lived in Utah said...

This is a big step, GNP. Many members have "transitive" testimonies of Joseph Smith, by which I mean they assume that if the Book of

Mormon is true, then its translator (JS) must have been a prophet. But it is another step to individually verify this claim. In fact I would suspect that relatively few have taken this step.

9:38 PM

gnp said...

Well, as I mentioned in my post, I wasn't actively looking to "verify this claim". It was given to me - for some reason I'm sure.

9:51 PM

David "El Salsero" said...

You realize that by accepting this to be true, everything else is false. As Joseph Smith says:

"...than I asked the Personages who stood above me in the light, which of all the sects was right (for at this time it had never entered into my heart that all were wrong) - and which I should join. 19 I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: "they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof."

Church leaders will try to sugar coat this point by saying that all faith systems don't have "all the truth." and somehow salvation will come to everyone. Well, if you believe what J.S. says, then what I believe must therefore be an abomination in the site of God. Wow!!!!!! Just curious how you personally reconcile this teaching with other faith systems now that you know in your heart that they are true?

One more question. Why does every faithful member of the LDS church need to share a testimony about the church's truthfulness? About the First Vision?

12:44 AM

gnp said...

Yes, I understand the implication. I never in a million years thought I'd reach this point so I need to figure out how to actualize it as part of my daily life. But I can't deny the experience - or the implications that come with it.

6:31 AM

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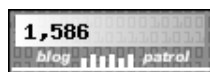
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June 25, 2006

MONDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2007

My Christmas Wish

This Christmas, my sincere wish is that the necessary healing and forgiveness will take place within my family and my wife's family that we might all be joyful to always be together as eternal families. This has been my consistent prayer over the last couple of days and my prayer to my Heavenly Father this morning at the Washington, DC temple. I have faith that this prayer will be answered, if not in this life then in the life hereafter.

The exact nature of my family's challenges and those of my wife's family are not appropriate to share in this post. A year and a half ago (see [prior post](#)), my brother-in-law JG gave a talk in which he said:

We may think that other people live blessed and charmed lives. What is more likely true is that those people keep their pain and suffering to themselves, and choose not to be miserable. It is interesting that whenever I get to know a charmed person well enough, I inevitably find that there are many troubles the person is dealing with below the surface. I have not yet found a person with whom I would change places, trading my troubles for their troubles. Our troubles are uniquely suited to help us develop.

The families I am a part of are no different in this regard. We have our troubles - significant troubles - but I believe that they are uniquely suited to help us develop. In the [premortal life](#), we chose to come to this Earth to learn and to grow and to be challenged. We may have picked our parents - or perhaps they picked us - but I'm confident we had some say in the matter. There is an important reason why we are together as a family unit and why, at this point in our lives, we face an important decision regarding how we want our family unit to go forward - whether we want to choose to fight to stay together or whether we will choose to drift apart. Right now, I think most family members would choose the latter option. Reconciliation - true, heartfelt, joyful reconciliation - seems almost impossible. It would be almost foolish to hope for, as much as we might wish for it in our hearts. But, this Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, I testify that our Savior lives, that He loves each of us, and, through His atoning sacrifice, we may be forgiven of our sins. Let us follow His supreme example and forgive ourselves and our loved ones and come together as a family.

Let me take a moment to be clear on a couple of key points. First, I know I am speaking in religious terms (and specifically LDS terms) when I speak of eternal families, premortal existence, and Jesus Christ. For those of you who do not believe in these things, please focus on the *spirit* of what I'm saying and not on the specific terms I'm using to articulate it. Independent of our individual religious beliefs, my wish remains the same - that healing and forgiveness may occur and that we may be joyful to be families (independent of whether or not you believe those families transcend death). Second, when I speak of forgiveness, I am not saying that we need to forget what has happened in the past or pretend that everything is ok when it's not. I'm also not saying that we shouldn't maintain appropriate boundaries, take necessary precautions, or take action when loved ones transgress against us. I am not saying that others do not need to take responsibility for what they have done or how they continue to act; or that others will not be judged on the totality of their lives. What I *am* saying is that we need to free up and put to better use the energy once consumed by holding grudges, harboring resentments, and nursing unhealed wounds. We need to rediscover the strengths we have always had and relocate our limitless capacity to understand and accept other people and ourselves.

My brother-in-law DE is fond of the scripture "the truth shall make you free" ([John 8:32](#)). I would agree. I am not saying we need to "air our dirty laundry" to the whole world to see. I don't think that would be appropriate. But I do feel strongly that there needs to be open and honest communication among family members - between parents and children and between spouses - regarding the truth of the past and the present. I believe this is essential to the healing process. A couple years ago, I spent two full days asking my parents very personal, sensitive, and penetrating questions about the past. I know that experience was quite challenging and emotional for my parents. I know I dug up old memories and "family secrets" they had carefully buried over the years. And I know they likely still live with scars from those "interviews". But I can say, without any reservation, that those discussions were transformational for me. The entire way I viewed my parents changed over those two days. At a time that I was ready to abandon my relationship with my parents, I gained a conviction that I wanted them in my life and the lives of my children. I was reminded - or more aptly discovered - how deeply they love me. And I forgave them for pain I carried around in my heart for many years. I thank them - from the bottom of my heart - for fighting for our family (even though at the time it probably didn't feel that way to them). The lines of communication have since closed a bit - certain topics, for example, are explicitly off-limits - but I am hopeful the lines of communication will open back up even if that causes occasional discomfort. I am also hopeful that there will be open lines of communication within my wife's family (and extended family) that the truth might make them free.

One quick message specifically to my parents and my wife's parents. You are children of parents as well and I know you have unresolved issues with your own parents (or your in-laws). Healing with your children can only be complete and everlasting if you also heal your relationships with your parents (whether they are living or not). None of us can change our past but we each have control over how we will let the past infiltrate our present and affect our future decisions.

In terms of why I believe this Christmas wish will be answered, I will quickly share a couple of personal experiences from the last few days. Shortly after I arrived here in Bethesda, I decided to do some raking so my father wouldn't need to do it this past weekend. My parents have a large lot and a great number of trees - hence many leaves to be cleared. In the midst of this project, I was thinking about my family and my wife's family and the seed of this post formed and became clear. At one point, I felt compelled to pray that healing might come to our families. Right after that, without any prompting from me, my mother, wife, and two sons came out to help me rake. Working as a family (my father was at work), we finished the project just as it was getting dark. There is no way I could have completed this project on my own and I took the rest of my family coming out when they did as a sign that my prayer had been heard.


Yesterday morning, I began fasting for my trip to the Washington temple today. Right after I began fasting, I felt that I wouldn't be able to make it through. I felt sick, lightheaded, and unable to focus. This fast was *much* harder than the ones before it. But, I resolved that I would complete the fast as planned. This morning, I felt fine - quite well actually. When I offered my prayer at the temple, I received the same confirmation I received at the Oakland temple (see [prior post](#)). I also don't think it's a coincidence that one of the missionaries at the Visitor's Center quoted the same scripture to me and my wife that I quoted to my mother the other night ([Alma 7:9-12](#)). I took this as a sign that healing and joy would indeed come to my family and my wife's family over time but that there would be challenges and discomfort along the way and that we would each need to resolve to overcome those challenges.

Finally, when I first came out to DC for this visit, I had no idea what I was supposed to get out of visiting this temple. The first morning we were here, my wife and my father had a "run-in" (and subsequent discussion) that got me thinking about all of this. It continues to amaze me to see how the Lord works through others in our lives.

As with all of my recent spiritual experiences, you could argue that I am reading into these events more than I should or that it's all wishful thinking. And, you might be right. But it doesn't change the strength of my convictions or my belief that our families are worth fighting for and

that we will only find true happiness if we heal ourselves and heal our relationships with one another.

With that, Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Posted by gnp at 8:29 PM 
Labels: [family](#) , [key post](#)

3 comments:

David "El Salsero" said...

Merry Christmas GNP! It's 12 minutes past midnight and I decided to read through your latest blog entry before heading off to bed. Again, I am astounded by the sincerity your words spoke to me as I read through your blog especially in regards to the family and the challenges we all face on this subject. You couldn't have said it any better. The notion of a perfect family is ludicrous, but it's funny how people certainly go out of there way to put forth that image. But that's true about anything we do in life, yet every year during the Christmas holiday, we are offered the opportunity to look outwardly and focus on the greater meanings of life and hopefully savor the happiness that those meanings can have in our own lives. For me, the message of Christmas is about hope. Despite the tribulations of my past and those that I will surely face, I push forward knowing that there is no greater message than the promise God has made to us. Quoting John 1 4:10, "***Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins to all of us.***" A daily dose of this message should remind us that we have the power to forgive, to let go of our difficult past, and to hope for a better tomorrow.

May the peace and love our Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and your family this Christmas day. Your brother in Christ: DE.

1:01 AM

KB said...

Dear GNP,

I have never met you, but I know your name from the family directory and have thought you must be a good guy since you had the good fortune to marry one of my favorite cousins.

My parents emailed me that you had asked them to pick a scripture for your baptism and sent links to your blog. My wife told me about the happy news of your baptism last night, but I didn't read the blogs till today. Curiously, I had a dream last night that I met you at an academic conference at a castle in Washington DC. Significance of dream: none I can guess, and the man didn't look like you at all, I suppose.

Anyway, today I read your accounts of recent events and was very impressed with the depth of your investigation and sincerity if your desire to know and do what is right. You speak the LDS language well and with understanding. I have long said that the best converts are spouses (or girlfriends / boyfriends) of members, who have reason enough to see what the life of a member is like and take it seriously enough to look deeper than the 5 or 6 missionary discussions. I also think the long wait till baptism is a good idea. By the time you get there, you already know you have enough staying power to last more than a couple of weeks.

I was amused by the Kool-Aid comment because my wife and I occasionally remark with some surprise and pleasure that so far all of our kids have "drunk the Kool-Aid." They all believe and attend, though they complain about getting up and dressed and fasting or whatever. We try to be good parents using wise lessons we have learned at church, and so far the kids are turning out fine. Do we have problems? Plenty. But we have been able to avoid some huge ones by just trying to do the right thing every day. My spiritual experiences over the years have set me on a course, but for daily observance, I look at the results of my choices. The Kool-Aid still tastes good and I haven't keeled over yet. In fact it seems to have made me stronger.

KB

9:16 AM

gnp said...

KB, thanks for the comment. In terms of your dream, not sure about the academic conference part but perhaps the "castle in Washington DC" is the DC temple. It's definitely a huge, magnificent, castle-like building. In the context of eternal families (my prayer at that temple), that would be a very suitable place to meet for the first time. Look forward to meeting you there or elsewhere.

12:24 PM

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One man's humble attempt to become a happier, more balanced person.

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2008

You can be the beginning

A week and a half ago, I visited [Rexburg, Idaho](#) to attend the temple open house there (see [prior post](#) for rationale). On Friday, January 11, I flew from SFO to SLC after work. On that flight, I ran into a couple that used to be in our ward that I hadn't seen in a long time. To my surprise, they were very familiar with my blog and why I was heading to Idaho. This couple also ended up attending my baptism a week later and commented that they felt the spirit was strong at the event (coincidence?).

My brother-in-law TR picked me up at the airport and we drove to [Pocatello, Idaho](#) to spend the night. There were forecasts for snow - and there were some flurries here and there - but the weather held up and the drive was uneventful. As I said in an earlier post, this was the first time that TR and I have had the opportunity to spend an extended block of time together (just the two of us). Usually we only see each other at family events and there are kids running around and five different conversations going in parallel. So it was very meaningful to spend dedicated 1:1 time with him. Prior to the trip, my father-in-law commented that the radio coverage is poor on the way from SLC to Rexburg and that we should bring some tapes along to pass the time. His specific comment was that there's only so much time you can fill with conversation. But TR and I had no trouble finding things to talk about - mostly family and religion. In fact, that night, we talked for about 6 hours straight from 7pm to 1am (both in the car and then in the motel). And then the next day, we talked for about 1.5 hours during the drive from Pocatello to Rexburg and for 4 hours during the drive from Rexburg back to SLC. It was a real blessing.

In terms of that night in Pocatello, the other thing that was meaningful about it is that I finished reading the Book of Mormon. At the point I decided to get baptized (see [prior post](#)), I was only 50 pages (~10%) of the way through the BOM. I set a goal for myself, however, that I would make it through the entire book before my baptism date. I fell behind in my reading for awhile (see [prior post](#)) and thought at times I wouldn't achieve this goal but I was able to pull it off. Let me be more specific - with the Lord's help (and only because of the Lord's help) was I able to pull it off. During the weeks leading up to this trip to Idaho, whenever I opened the BOM to continue my reading, I was alert and able to absorb

the material regardless of how tired I might otherwise be. I know with certainty that the Lord was leading me by the hand through this process (see [D&C 112:10](#)).

During the week leading up to the trip, I thought I should put Moroni's promise (see [Moroni 10:3-5](#)) to the test again and ask for another spiritual confirmation of the BOM like the one I received 14 years ago (see [prior post](#)). But I chose not to do that - not because I feared I wouldn't receive another confirmation but because I knew in my heart it was already true. In particular, I thought about a story a friend told me soon after I decided to be baptized:

Let me tell you my story about coming to know the Book of Mormon is true. As a teenager, I really struggled (for lots of reasons). I was rebellious and quite unsure that I wanted to accept the faith that my parents had taught me. But I was irritated by peopling mocking my family's religion. I wondered why I was so offended if I didn't believe in it (since I was offended beyond the usual "being offended" I feel when someone mocks anyone's beliefs). I decided that it was time to figure things out for myself, so I decided to read the Book of Mormon and put Moroni's promise to the test.

So, I read the Book of Mormon. I read every day and was quite dedicated until I finished. I remember the day it was time to pray about it. I was in the downstairs bedroom of my parents' house. I knelt down and said – "Okay, I have read the Book of Mormon. I have read with real intent. I have done my part. I want to test Moroni's promise. I want to know for myself if it is true. Please help me to feel that it is true and please help me to recognize the answer." (I don't know if those were the exact words, but you get the message.) I felt nothing spectacular. Really. Nothing spectacular. So I prayed again and asked again. Nothing. I said, "Heavenly Father, you have promised that if I really study and want to know, you will answer me." I must have asked several times. And then the thoughts came to my mind, "Why, my child, do you ask me now? I have already answered you. Do you not see? Do you not recognize? Can you not see that reading this book has changed your life?" I did not hear words. I did not hear a voice. But I felt these thoughts as clear impressions. As I sat and pondered what I felt, I knew it was true. In the short time I had read the Book of Mormon, I had changed so much. While I still struggled with the same difficulties that had led to my rebellion in the first place, I had experienced a change of heart. I viewed myself differently. I viewed my family differently. My desires were different. My behavior had changed. What had caused these things? Studying the Book of Mormon. The spirit of that book had worked a mighty change in my life and there was no turning back. I knew it had to be the word of God and I knew the Lord knew he had already given me sufficient answer to my inquiry. Although I have stumbled and fallen short many times

since that initial conversion, I cannot deny what I felt that day. It has stayed with me all these years.

So, instead of asking for a confirmation of the truthfulness of the BOM, I thanked the Lord for the confirmation I had already received, the impact that the BOM and my new faith had already had in my life, and the impact it will have in my life for all eternity. I also asked the Lord to stay with me and let me know what decisions I should make in my life - and have the courage and conviction to make (and stick with) those decisions even if they're not popular or have short-term consequences.

In terms of the visit to the temple itself, it was very meaningful to me. The topic of eternal families has been on my mind a lot recently (see [prior post](#)). Interestingly, the Sunday before my trip, a young girl shared her testimony in Sacrament meeting. She spoke about how her family had visited the Rexburg open house over the holidays. She also spoke about how happy she was that her family could be together forever. I'm sure she wasn't thinking of me as she shared these prophetic comments and surely didn't know the impact that they'd have on me - just another example of the Lord working through each of us in ways that we'll never fully comprehend.


For each of my temple trips, there has been something very specific I got out of it. Now, I had no clue going into each visit what that something would be. The covenant, on some level, was that I was going to exercise faith and show up at the appointed hour and then the Lord would take it from there. And the Lord consistently delivered on His part of the promise each and every time (for which I am incredibly humbled and grateful). This time around, the purpose of my temple visit was to deepen my testimony and conviction regarding the power of eternal families. Specifically, in one of the sealing rooms in the temple, KC talked about how the sealing ordinance serves as a welding bond between your ancestry and your posterity. The two become connected in a way that cannot be torn apart (see, for example, [Matthew 16:19](#) - "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven"). He also said (and this is what touched me most deeply) is that you can be the beginning of your eternal family. Even if you're the first person in your family to accept the gospel (as I am on my side of the family), you can be the beginning of your eternal family. Your faith can benefit your posterity through direct example and transition through future generations but, due to the power of vicarious ordinances and the authority that has been restored to perform them, our faith can also benefit our ancestry and unite us as an eternal family.

I realize that some people - particularly some in my family - will have a very hard time with what I just said. I know they don't believe in vicarious ordinances and also have trouble with other aspects of the gospel. Perhaps that will change at some point or perhaps not. But I

cannot deny what I know in my heart to be true - just as I wouldn't want them to deny in their hearts what they know to be true.

The other thing that KC said that was meaningful to me was about not focusing on yourself. In the sealing rooms, there are facing mirrors. KC asked a couple to stand up and faced one of the mirrors. He then made the observation that if you focus on yourself in the mirror, you see yourself and the image stops there. But if you shift your view to your spouse and focus on her, you can see into the distance forever.

One last thing. I am incredibly grateful to KC and his wife for being so generous with their time during my visit. KC personally gave me and TR our tour of the temple and then invited us back to his home for lunch. His wife personally prepared the food and was so welcoming to both of us. I was completely blown away that they would do that - especially given all the other demands on their time. I can only hope that I can follow their example in the future and return the favor by helping others who are seeking or in need of assistance.

Posted by gnp at 3:59 AM 

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2008

Baptism and Confirmation

This past weekend, I was baptized and confirmed a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Both of those events were meaningful to me but my real hope and prayer during the last week was that they would also be an uplifting and testimony-building experience for those around me. It was also my hope and prayer that these events would serve as a uniting - rather than dividing - force for my family and extended family. I believe that both of these prayers were answered.

In terms of the baptism itself, my son JD stole the show in many ways (which was totally fine with me). He appointed himself the "baptism director" and wanted to oversee every aspect of the event. He helped me prepare the programs (see [PDF](#)). We got to the church early so he could help setup chairs and get everything ready. When people began to arrive, he told them where to sit and what the program had in store. He and my brother conducted a family scripture portion of the program while my brother-in-law JG and I were getting changed after the ordinance itself. And afterwards he helped with the clean-up. It was so fun to see his enthusiasm for the event.

I was surprised by the number of people who attended. When I spoke with the Ward Mission Leader, he said that typically he makes 25 programs for a baptism; perhaps 40 if there will be a lot of family there. After we setup the chairs, I asked JD to count them and there were 67. And every one of them ended up being filled with some additional folks in the doorway. So I'm guessing there were probably 70 people or so at the event. I was commenting on this to the Ward Mission Leader after the event and he said "people like you and they know you like them". For whatever reason, that comment made me a little uncomfortable. But I was still grateful that so many people took time out of their schedule to attend.

My brother-in-law DE offered a moving opening prayer and his wife BE offered an equally moving closing prayer. My sisters-in-law NR and HG offered heart-felt testimonies of God's love for us and their faith in the gospel. I was very touched with what they both said. HG, in particular, has been my "borrowed light" up to this point - and undoubtedly will serve in that capacity for some time to come.

I was very pleased that a family member (my brother-in-law JG) was able to baptize me, that another family member (my wife's uncle GH) was able to be a witness, and that a close family friend (RW) was able to be the other witness. RW flew in from SLC for the day and GH and his wife PH drove up from Fresno (which isn't easy given GH's health challenges since his stroke). As I was immersed under the water, I opened my eyes for a moment and it was as if the heavens peeked through to me for a moment. Later, one of the attendees observed that there was a full moon out during the day and that was a sign that the heavens were smiling down on me.

It was very important to me that every part of my family and my extended family were represented in some way during the program. For family members who could not attend in person, I asked them to submit a scripture that had significance to their family and these scriptures were read aloud by volunteers from the audience. I wasn't present for that part of the program (since I was changing out of wet clothes) but I heard it went very well and people got value out of the scriptures. I have no doubt the thoughts and prayers of family not present helped build the spirit for this part of the program.

During the week, I worried a lot about what I might say after I was baptized. In the midst of this worry, I read this scripture and it had meaning to me: "Take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you." ([Matthew 10:19-20](#)) I ended up talking about the fact that there wasn't any doubt in my mind that I was doing the right thing when I married my wife and I had a similar feeling about being baptized that day. When I first made the decision to be baptized, I didn't see how that would be true but the Lord lead me through it each step of the way.

Two quick asides. The week before I was baptized, I was completely stressed out and overwhelmed at work. There was lots going on and I didn't see how I was going to get everything done - especially given the fact that my entire weekend was spoken for. One of the missionaries shared this scripture with me and then I came across it in my own reading: "Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. ([Matthew 6:31-34](#))"

Also, I decided to fast from about 3pm the day before until after my baptism. We had a family brunch scheduled the morning of my baptism and I chose not to participate in it (at least the eating part). This was

disappointing to my wife since she prepared this special meal and cooking is something that requires a lot of effort for her. I actively questioned whether I should break my fast early so I could be part of the brunch. I prayed that morning that God would help me decide what to do. And I got the impression I should read the scriptures for an answer and came across this scripture: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. ([Matthew 10:37-39](#))"

Regarding the confirmation, I asked one of the missionaries to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost on me (see [article](#)). There are others who are more "spiritually advanced" whom I could have asked to have done this (including the others who were part of the confirmation circle) but I selected this particular person based on reading this [article](#) from the *Ensign*. In the article, Elder Clayton Christensen says "None of Jesus's original Twelve Apostles had evidenced adequate experience or commitment when He called them. Enoch, Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Amos, and Joseph Smith were unqualified by the world's standards when the Lord put them to work. But God transformed them. We will build greater strength and our wards and branches will grow when we stop relying solely on the strongest members."

In terms of what was said, here is a rough but hopefully fairly accurate recreation. Three people were taking notes (thanks!) and I remembered some additional stuff as well.

GNP, By the power and authority of the Melchizadek Priesthood which we hold, we confirm you a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and say unto you, Receive the Holy Ghost. Your Heavenly Father is very pleased with you and your decision to come unto Christ and receive the ordinances of baptism and confirmation, a decision you have made with all your heart. Heavenly Father knows this has been a difficult decision for you and He is proud of your strength, and, as you continue to grow in the church, you will be a guiding light to your family and those you meet and a strength to those around you. We do these things in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Shortly after the confirmation, I gave my "hypothetical" talk on why missionary work is so important (see [prior post](#)). Out of everything from the whole weekend, this was likely the thing I was most nervous about. Again, as would appear the pattern of the week, I found a scripture that put my mind at ease (and one that I put to the test during my talk): "When a man speaketh by the power of the Holy Ghost the power of the Holy Ghost carrieth it unto the hearts of the children of men. ([2 Nephi 33:1](#))" I thought the talk went very well and even I was surprised

with the force and conviction with which I delivered the message. I surely spoke with the power of the Holy Ghost and I attribute 100% of my success to that (and not to me or my personal abilities). It was also my prayer that my talk would touch people's hearts in some way. Based on some of the comments afterwards, I believe that prayer was answered (again by the power of the Holy Ghost).

Relative to the talk I posted back in December, I did change the conclusion. Specifically, I talked about a comment that one of the ward members shared with me after my baptism. He said that with the help of the Holy Ghost, I cannot fail. I testified to others that if they put their faith in the Lord and accept the help of the Holy Ghost, they cannot fail either.

Even though I didn't share these final comments from my original talk on Sunday, let me reiterate them here:

I would like to sincerely thank the members of this ward for creating an environment so welcoming to the Spirit. I would like to thank the missionaries for their tireless work on the Lord's behalf. I would like to thank my family and friends for their unconditional love and support through this process and through life in general. And I would most importantly like to thank our Heavenly Father for answering our prayers, for sticking with us throughout our lives, and for knowing when we are ready to accept Him into our hearts.

Posted by gnp at 6:01 AM



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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 23, 2008

[A message to my future self](#)

This past weekend, you were baptized and confirmed a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Regardless of what happens in your life, remember always that your Heavenly Father loves you and He wants you and your family to return to live in his presence. You will surely experience peaks and valleys as you go through life - both spiritual and temporal. When things are going well, remember always that the many blessings in your life come from God, be thankful and humble for that, and re-double your efforts to serve the Lord and observe his Commandments. When things are not going well, remember always to put your full faith in the Lord, repent, and know of the great power of His atoning sacrifice. The Lord has helped you get this far. He has led you by the hand and answered your prayers. He will not abandon you unless you abandon Him. You can always return to Him. He will always take you back. Above all else, accept the will of God in your life and the lives of others and always strive to serve as an instrument of God's will on this earth; not for your own glory but for His. Our Heavenly Father has a plan for each of us and life works in a way that only He can fully comprehend.

If you ever doubt these things to be true, know with every fiber of your being that on this day and at this time you knew that they were true and summon strength from the fact that, for at least one fleeting moment, you were without doubt.

Posted by gnp at 5:35 AM 
Labels: [family](#) , [key post](#) , [religion](#)

1 comments:

Anonymous said...

A couple people I know have talked about the need to keep a spirituality journal because the really significant spiritual encounters they've had seem to fade over time. They both said they wish they had written them down so they could refer to them in times of confusion, sadness, etc. I didn't really put it together before, but your blog really serves this purpose. How nice it will be for you to be able to come back to this when you need to. love you

[3:50 PM](#)